

Psychologists surmise

How success ethic harms suburban families

By SYLVIA R. DEVLIN

The lesson of making it in the world of business may be more damaging to a person's emotional and physical health than what is gained according to Dr. Charles Meredith, a certified consulting psychologist in Farmington Hills.

Men begin suffering a variety of anxiety symptoms like hypertension, ulcers, heart attacks and other stress-related illnesses when they begin carrying too heavy a load, he says. Depression and anxiety are the most common emotional disorders occurring in corporate husbands, according to Robert O'Neill, a Farmington Hills psychologist.

There is a leveling of powerlessness and the man may feel that the whole damn system is chewing up our family, he says.

Women are increasingly picking up the same symptoms as they enter careers, according to Meredith.

Another phenomenon which Meredith has observed is the increasing dependence of the child-dominated home.

The father compensates by giving to

the child, he says. "He wants to be a pal and show that he's not such a bad guy."

A level of frustration exists in the family since it is difficult to relate to the man on the treadmill, he says. Family members usually adapt and compensate.

"The family learns to take from the producer of material goods and therefore is perpetuating the system," he says.

Emotional and interpersonal needs may be met with other people, says Meredith. Sometimes these needs may just be denied.

In some families, elementary-age kids run everything, he says. This is frustrating to the parents because this isn't part of the American tradition.

Members of the family describe the father in shadowy, abstract terms, he says. On the other hand there is a clear picture of the mother and siblings.

This is more than just not being there, says Meredith. It says that when he is there, he maintains a kind of distance.

The child can remember things the father did with him but may have difficulty

telling you who the father is or was, according to Meredith.

"Earlier generations would have settled for less, but since World War II the expectations of the society have changed and this has resulted in a behavioral change," he says.

Time urgency is a big part of the suburban male work pattern, he says. There is also a competitive factor that is not just restricted to work but also reflects on the life pattern.

"The idea of 'I'm running hard and competing as fast as I can, then I'm succeeding,' is instilled in a man at a very early age," says Meredith.

"Men virtually become addicted to these patterns and the patterns become ends to themselves and not just means."

Most men aren't that delighted with their work, but want the material wealth and are no escape," says O'Neill.

"They want to make it by 30 or 35. Soon they realize they're not going to be president of GM but they still move upward. It becomes insatiable," he says.

There also exists an inherent dissatisfaction with life, says Meredith. They're running and competing and not really enjoying it very much.

The business owns them. They don't feel like slaves but they complain a lot, according to O'Neill.

A lot of the troubled men want time off to get back to their families. When they fi-

nally get the time, two-thirds of it is taken up by unwinding," he says. "The rest of the vacation is spent thinking of what to do when one returns to the job."

All of this becomes confusing because they have been taught that if they run hard enough and compete hard they will be happy, says Meredith.

This type of individual will only run faster when presented with this dilemma because they can't see they're doing something wrong, he says.

"There is a built-in futility in this system and it becomes difficult to stop running because the person doesn't know how to do anything else," says Meredith.

This isn't to say that they're doomed. They can learn different ways of life, he says. Bad thinking behavior patterns are very difficult to change.

The man may recognize the conflicts but as soon as the priorities are rearranged he feels he has dropped out of the race, says O'Neill.

The suburban male expects to be a good father and husband and he takes it as failure if the children aren't happy or close to him," says Meredith.

Seventy years ago it wasn't important to be a friend to his wife and children, he comments.

There is a blending of roles in the suburbs and the father is also expected to attend scout meetings and go camping with the kids, he says. "He will try to sched-

ule 26 hours of activity in 24 and try to be in all these places at one time."

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